

The Journey Matters

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish

Lent 2

March 16-17, 2019

The Lament over Jerusalem

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

—Luke 13:31-35, NRSV

Grace and peace to you from Christ, who today, tomorrow, and the next longs for the whole world to experience God's protection, shelter and embrace. Who stands in direct opposition to the norms in this world of violence and bloodshed. And proclaims God's heart. God's desires. God's longing. For all God's children to be gathered as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Amen.

Move 1: New Zealand

Another week. Another tragedy. I woke up Friday morning, like you, hearing and learning about the forty-nine people killed in Christchurch, New Zealand. People who went to morning prayers. To worship a God of peace and love.

Who were tragically taken. Undeservingly struck down.

It just seems like our world today. More and more, violence seems to be the norm. Hatred. Division. It sometimes feels as if we are being told to just accept it, this way of life. That it's a natural reality we just have to navigate, accept, and live with.

I want to start by sharing we stand in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters throughout our world. In Aurora. And especially in Christchurch.

In our Baptisms and when we affirm our baptisms, we renounce all the forces that defy God. That are counter to the ways and will of God. Today, we join churches throughout

the world and renounce white supremacy, racism, Islamophobia, hatred, and any and all acts of violence against another.

Violence. Killing. Tearing down another. Thinking we are above anyone else, based on sexuality, race, gender, religion, socio economic status. These are not the ways of God. These are products of our broken and fallen world.

We worship the one God. "Allah" is the Arabic word for God. Christians who speak Arabic pray to Allah, just as Christians who speak English pray to God. We are more alike than different. More connected than disconnected. More together than not.

We pray for our Muslim siblings. We pray God gives us peace and shows us the path to justice. A path where we join shoulder to shoulder working for peace that lasts. Peace that longs for all people to be embraced. That longs for all people to experience the abundant compassion and love of God.

Move 2: Tie-in with Scripture

This week, I hear Jesus' voice saying, "Christchurch, Christchurch, 'how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings' " (Luke 13:34).

Jesus is lamenting the community of Christchurch, just as Jesus lamented the city of Jerusalem. The ways of this world were violent back in Jesus time. The same holds true today.

The Jewish leaders of the time tell Jesus to halt his journey. The Pharisees genuinely are worried for Jesus' well-being. They warn him, "Get away from here. Don't you see what will happen to you? Herod will kill you. For your messages of love. Your ways of mercy. Your proclamation that all will be delivered. It's upsetting the powers of the empire. The ways of this world."

They tell Jesus to do the right thing. The smart thing. The wise thing. "Run away. Give up. Give in."

While I believe the Jewish leaders' intentions are good, I don't see them as foes, here, to Jesus' ministry. I think they are being friends.

But the issue is their motivation. They are completely being motivated by fear. They don't decry the violence that is commonplace. They think the only way is that of this world: Violence. It's natural. It's the norm. Accept it. [1]

And because of this, they tell Jesus do the smart thing in light of the ways of this world: flee.

And the good news? This gives us hope. This inspires me in a way I need today. Jesus *doesn't* flee. Jesus doesn't give in. Give up. The warning and threat of violence doesn't deter Jesus' journey.

Jesus tells the Jewish leaders and tells us. A promise. He will keep on going. His journey won't be controlled or swayed the ways of this world. His face is set to Jerusalem and Herod. Not any person with earthly, empire-thinking can stop him.

As we know as believers of the resurrection, not even death can keep Jesus down. That third day it is, as Jesus says, all fulfilled.

No, Jesus' future isn't decided by human will; it's decided by God's will. God's vision. God's love. That's what decides Jesus' destination and that's what drives Jesus on the road.

God's will. God's way. That leads Jesus. That is his strength and guide to stay determined. Determined to keep walking the journey. Toward Jerusalem. And that's what gives me hope, and I feel needs to be preached this weekend.

Jesus keeps going. His courage. His dedication. To love us even when we don't follow or live in the ways he taught us. Even when we are stuck in the thinking of this world. Even when we are experiencing tragedy as a result of earthly, empire-thinking.

Jesus keeps going. Keeps coming. Keeps doing his daily ministry of healing and deliverance.

Move 3: Scripture

Jesus knows what is to come of him. He hears the warnings. But he doesn't stop.

In verses 34-35 of Luke 13, Jesus acknowledges how some in the world are receiving him. And he doesn't respond with anger toward Jerusalem. Instead, Jesus responds with compassion. With lament.

Jesus laments the people who don't hear or want to hear of God's loving embrace. He laments not for himself and what awaits him, but for us. For those in this world who experience hardship. Struggle. Strife. And for those who resist Jesus' invitation to be brought under God's protecting and sheltering wings.

Jesus longs for all of us to experience that compassion. That love that is so different from the ways of this world.

Transition

Lent is often a time we focus on the cross. And rightly so. The cross is a significant symbol of Christianity and is "the central revelation of God's embrace of humankind and triumph of God's love." [2]

I consider myself a theologian of the cross. I connect to a Suffering God. Putting my trust in a God who joins in our mess and suffers with and for us brings me comfort. I find deep meaning in the cross. And feel Lent is a perfect time to focus our eyes on the cross.

All that said, I was struck in my reading and research this week that ten chapters in Luke are given to Jesus' journey.

In chapter 9, Jesus is in Galilee. And there we read that Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. The journey begins.

But in Luke's Gospel, Jesus doesn't enter Jerusalem until chapter 19.

Yes, the cross matters. And the passion story matters. But so does the journey. We learn in Scripture that Jesus is determined to get to his final destination. That nothing will stop him from going to Jerusalem and, inevitably, the cross.

Yet I am struck by Jesus' words in today's Gospel reading. Jesus is midway on his journey. Nearing closer and closer to Jerusalem. He hears the warning.

And he says, "Today, tomorrow and the next I will be on my way ... casting out demons ... performing cures (Luke 13:31-32).

He is just as equally determined and focused to take time along the way to heal those who are sick, to teach his disciples, to call people to follow him, to bless children, to restore the neglected back into community, to liberate those captive to spirits, to proclaim God's never-ending love, and to lament all those who oppose God's way. [3]

Jesus has his eyes set. His vision is clear. And Jesus is determined to get there.

But Jesus doesn't forget the path or make the journey a sprint. Jesus gives attention to those on the road. Jesus stops to have conversations. Because we matter. You matter. I matter. We all matter to God.

Jesus doesn't plow ahead and run over people on the way. Jesus trusts that God has set his travel itinerary. [4] That is what guides him, leads him, and gives him the determination to keep going.

However, Jesus welcomes the interruptions on the road. Welcomes the stranger. Child. Sick. Foreigner.

Jesus' life. The way he lived. How he was on the journey. It matters. Deeply. In revealing who God is. And how we are to follow and live as saints today.

Move 4: Jesus' life teaches us

We, too, know our destination. We know that, thanks to God's love, God's grace, God's embrace, we inherit eternal life. Nothing, not even death, can stop us from that.

Yet we all have time now. In between now and then. All of us find ourselves on the road. On the way. Journeying.

And I find myself clinging to the life of Jesus this week. I'm reminded that Jesus chose today, tomorrow, and the next—every day—to continue going. To keep on the way.

What we do in this in-between matters. Just as it mattered to Jesus. When we take time to bless our children, greet our neighbor, befriend a stranger, comfort the grieving, stand

with those experiencing injustice, include those being excluded, we give witness to who God is. [5] To Jesus, who showed us and told us God's longing that all experience God's loving embrace. That all God's children be gathered up like a hen with her chicks.

Move 5: Joke

I'm sure you've heard the joke, but I find myself relating to it lately, based on all the violence that just seems to continue happening in our world.

One Sunday morning a mother went in to wake her son and tell him it was time to get ready for church, to which he replied, "I'm not going."

"Why not?" she asked.

"I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "(1) They don't like me, and (2) the world doesn't make any sense anymore."

His mother replied, "I'll give you two good reasons why you SHOULD go to church. (1) You're forty-nine years old, and (2) you're the pastor!"

A goofy aside, but sometimes I find myself just wanting to give in. It's a hard world we live in. Violence does seem to be the norm and what we are unconsciously being told to just accept.

However, that's why we need faith. That's why we cling to God's promises. They keep us going. Jesus' courage and dedication inspires us to keep going. To keep our eyes set.

This Lent. This weekend. We need this message from Jesus on the road to Jerusalem.

We need to know that God's will is at work in the world. Jesus shows us God's vision, which stands in direct opposition to violence and hatred. It's a new way. And it's now our way.

Something beyond, someone bigger, guides us. Leads us. Keeps us going. We believe in a future that we ourselves cannot quite even imagine. A future that isn't based on me or you. A future that is more. That is revealed by the One who never lost his way. [6]

The One who invites us to walk the path. Not alone, but together. With him. And with one another. Today, tomorrow, and the next.

Amen.

Resources

[1] Reese, Ruth Anne. "Commentary on Luke 13: 31-35." *WorkingPreacher*. Woringpreacher.org. February 21, 2016.

[2] Lose, David. "Lent 2 C: Meanwhile..." *...In the Meantime: Where faith meets everyday life*. davidlose.net. Mar 12, 2019.

[3] Lose, David. "Lent 2 C: Meanwhile..." *...In the Meantime: Where faith meets everyday life*.

[4] Jacobsen, David Schnasa. "Commentary on Luke 13: 31-35." *WorkingPreacher*. Workingpreacher.org. Mar 17, 2019.

[5] Lose, David. "Lent 2 C: Meanwhile..." *...In the Meantime: Where faith meets everyday life*.

[6] Lewis, Karoline. "Determination." *Dear Working Preacher*. Workingpreach.org. March 11, 2019.

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Reflection Questions

- What rituals or practices do you hold onto that help you overcome and keep going on the journey of faith?
- What makes it difficult to receive God's love?
- How does it change you knowing God deeply longs to gather you under Her wings?